

REMARKS

With the cancellation of claims 11-25 and 28-30, claims 1-10, 26, and 27 are now pending in the above-referenced application and are submitted for the Examiner's reconsideration.

Claims 1-10, 26, and 27 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Howe publication. Applicants submit that the Examiner is mistaken. First of all, there is no suggestion to be gathered from the publication that, in addition to acidic or alkaline etching solutions, neutral etching solutions are able to be used as well. Furthermore, even if a neutral etching solution were used, the etching process itself would produce an acidic solution. As explained in the specification, a germanic acid $H_2Ge(OH)_6$ is released when etching germanium-containing layers, so that an originally neutral etching solution would undergo a shift in its pH value into the acidic range in the course of the etching procedure, whereupon an attack of other metallic surfaces of the micro—system would then take place. Because a buffer is utilized in the present invention, a neutral pH value is able to be ensured not only at the beginning of the etching process but also during the etching process, thereby preventing undesired etching attacks of metal surfaces that are not to be etched. Accordingly, claim 1 (and all claims dependent thereon) are patentable over this publication.

Applicants assert that the present invention is new, non-obvious, and useful. Reconsideration and allowance of the claims are requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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